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New Dedicated Revenue Coalition Launches in Portland, Oregon

by Michael Anderson // 2015, Winter



Advocates for affordable homes, ending homelessness, tenant's rights, and racial equity launched the Welcome Home coalition in November to lead a campaign to secure new, dedicated sources of funding to make housing more affordable in Portland, Oregon and the surrounding metro region. To mark the public launch of the coalition, Welcome Home released a survey of potential revenue sources that reviewed nine city, county and regional housing trust funds and the revenue sources that fund them. The goal of the revenue source survey is to advance the conversation among decision makers at the City of Portland, Multnomah and Washington Counties, and Metro, a regional government entity, by building public support around a designated revenue source in the first half of 2015.

Welcome Home's [survey of revenue tools](#) to fund affordable housing and services in the Portland Metro region highlights eleven revenue sources through profiles of housing trust funds in Boston, MA; Charlotte, NC; Columbus and Franklin County, OH; Miami-Dade County, FL; Philadelphia, PA, San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Somerville, MA; and Washington State counties. The revenue sources include a business registration fee, document recording fees, general obligation bonds, in lieu fees, linkage fees, a lodging tax, a property tax levy, a real estate transfer tax, and a restaurant tax. The jurisdiction profiles include a description of the revenue source, a summary of the campaign to secure the revenue source, how the funds are allocated, and a comparison of how the profiled jurisdiction compares to Portland.

“The revenue survey is a menu to help our political leaders make a choice and take action to address the housing needs of families, seniors, people with disabilities and others currently being priced out of the communities they call home,” said Oregon ON executive director John Miller. *“Current state law in Oregon prohibits many of the options used by other communities in the survey, meaning we already now have a short list of four: GO bonds, a linkage fee, a property tax levy, and a restaurant tax.”*

The Welcome Home coalition was initiated by 211info, Coalition of Communities of Color, Community Alliance of Tenants, JOIN, Oregon ON, and Street Roots in response to rapidly rising housing costs in the Portland Metro area, and dwindling resources from The City of Portland’s Urban Renewal set aside, which dedicates 30% of all tax increment financing (TIF) funds to affordable housing. The seven organizations comprised the core of the coalition, Portland Safety Net, that from 2011 through 2013 joined together to successfully protect City of Portland housing and homeless funds at risk of budget cuts. While the Safety Net coalition was able to effectively mobilize the housing, homeless and equity advocates to defend against budget cuts, advocates realized that in order to build public will for a new investment in affordable homes that a new coalition was needed with the capacity to more broadly engage advocates outside of the City of Portland, and that had the single focus of securing new revenue, as opposed to a coalition that was potentially sidetracked by annual budget battles. The advocates also realized that if the revenue coalition was to succeed, it required dedicated staff.



“Hiring a coordinator is what vaulted us forward,” said Israel Bayer, Executive Director of Street Roots, Portland’s street newspaper. *“We realized we did not have the bandwidth to both run annual budget campaigns and do the long term work of building a coalition capable of winning the new funding for housing that the Portland area needs. Most of the core partners in Welcome Home are EDs who already have full plates. Now with Jes Larson as Coalition Director there is someone to drive the research, build the relationships necessary to grow the coalition, and to keep us core members engaged, on point and efficiently deployed.”*

Since she started with Welcome Home in July, Larson has established working committees for communication, planning regional outreach forums, vetting the revenue source, resource development and building the coalition; conducted the revenue research and published the survey; and unveiled a website (welcomehomecoalition.org), Facebook and Twitter account. Perhaps most impressive, in the last two months of 2014, coalition membership list grew from the core seven to forty-six.

With the goal of selecting a revenue source by early summer of 2015, Welcome Home is meeting with political champions on the Portland City Council, Multnomah County Commission, and the Metro regional government, as well as conducting a series of stakeholder forums in communities throughout the Metro area.

“The Coalition is working strategically to win a campaign, but also urgently to address the growing affordability crisis,” said Larson. *“We see every day how the lack of affordable housing is impacting our neighbors and local families who are at risk every month of losing their homes to rent increases or lost wages. The experience of homelessness is a reality for more children and families than ever. We now understand that modern day homelessness cannot be resolved without new, locally dedicated funding. And yet ending homelessness is very much within our reach. Just as we came together to ensure education, basic nutrition and now healthcare, we can resolve to ensure that everyone has access to a safe and stable place to call home.”*

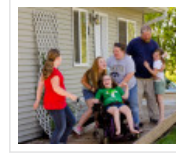
To download the revenue survey, go to: <http://welcomehomecoalition.org/the-data/>. For more information about Welcome Home, contact Jes Larson at Jes@welcomehomecoalition.org, (503) 442-9905.

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